

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

**1. Name of Property**

historic name Shannon Cemetery  
other names/site number VDHR file no. 035-5028

**2. Location**

street & number Northwest side intersection of Highways 42 and 100 N/A not for publication  
city or town Pearisburg X vicinity  
state Virginia code VA county Giles code 071 zip code 24134

**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination    request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets    does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant    nationally    statewide X locally. (    See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

Virginia Department of Historic Resources  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property    meets    does not meet the National Register criteria. (    See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting or other official/Title Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

**4. National Park Service Certification**

I hereby certify that this property is:

<u>  </u> entered in the National Register.	Signature of the Keeper _____
<u>  </u> See continuation sheet.	
<u>  </u> determined eligible for the National Register.	
<u>  </u> See continuation sheet.	
<u>  </u> determined not eligible for the National Register.	Date of Action _____
<u>  </u> removed from the National Register.	
<u>  </u> other (explain): _____	

Shannon Cemetery  
Name of Property  
State

Giles County, Virginia  
County and

## 5. Classification

### Ownership of Property Category of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply) (Check only one box)

☒ private  
☐ public-local  
☐ public-State  
☐ public-Federal  
☐ building(s)  
☐ district  
☒ site  
☐ structure  
☐ object

### Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
0	0	buildings
2	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
2	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

Number of contributing resources previously listed  
in the National Register 0

## 6. Function or Use

### Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Category	Subcategory
FUNERARY	cemetery

### Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Category	Subcategory
FUNERARY	cemetery

## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

N/A

### Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation	<u>N/A</u>
walls	<u>N/A</u>
roof	<u>N/A</u>
other	<u>Stone, Concrete, Metal</u>

## Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

☒ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

☐ **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

☒ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

☐ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

☐ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

☐ **B** removed from its original location.

☐ **C** a birthplace or a grave.

☒ **D** a cemetery.

☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.

☐ **F** a commemorative property.

☐ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past fifty years.

### Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

ART

EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT

ETHNIC HISTORY: BLACK

Period of Significance Ca. 1800-1955

Significant Dates N/A

Cultural Affiliation N/A

### Significant Person

Architect/Builder Spyker, B. F. (tombstone carver)

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)  
N/A

## Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

### Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

### Previous documentation on file (NPS):

☐ preliminary determination of individual listing  
(36 CFR 67) has been requested  
☐ previously listed in the National Register  
☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register  
☐ designated a National Historic Landmark  
☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey# \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record# \_\_\_\_\_

### Primary location of additional data:

☒ State Historic Preservation Office  
☐ Other State agency  
☐ Federal agency  
☐ Local government  
☐ University  
☐ Other  
Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreage of Property** \_\_\_\_\_ approximately 1 acres

### UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1 17	522930	4118870	2 17	522980	4119120
_____ See continuation sheet.					

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title	J. Daniel Pezzoni	date	January 8, 2006
organization	Landmark Preservation Associates	telephone	(540) 464-5315
street & number	6 Houston St.	city or town	Lexington
city or town	Lexington	state	VA
		zip code	24450

**Additional Documentation** Submit the following items with the completed form:

### Continuation Sheets

#### Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

#### Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

#### Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

**Property Owner** (Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name	Tom and Ellie Miller	telephone	(540) 599-1111
street & number	167 Riverbend Drive	city or town	Pearisburg
city or town	Pearisburg	state	Virginia
		zip code	24134

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this

form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Shannon Cemetery  
Giles County, Virginia

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## NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

### Summary

The Shannon Cemetery occupies two adjacent ridges overlooking the Poplar Hill community and Big Walker Creek in southern Giles County, Virginia. The two discontinuous sections of the cemetery are located approximately a thousand feet apart at about 1,900 feet in elevation above sea level. The white section covers a half acre and the apparent concentration of graves in the black section appears to cover an area of approximately 50 by 150 feet. Each section has a sloping site that faces east and rows of graves aligned north-south. The white (south) section, established in 1781, is dominated by a large maple (over a hundred years old) and is surrounded by a modern wire fence and pasture. The black (north) section, which was established in the nineteenth century (presumably the antebellum period, possibly as early as the late eighteenth century), is overgrown with multiflora roses and other shrubs but it retains large cedars that date to the historic period and it is covered with periwinkle, a traditional cemetery groundcover. The white section contains a variety of gravemarkers including inscribed and uninscribed fieldstones, decoratively carved tombstones of indigenous stone and imported marble, concrete markers, and twentieth century granite monuments. The black section has small uninscribed fieldstone markers and one professionally carved marble headstone.

### Inventory

1. Shannon Cemetery (white section). 1781 and later. Contributing site.
2. Shannon Cemetery (black section). 19th century and later. Contributing site.

### White Section

The oldest gravemarkers in the white section of the cemetery are uninscribed fieldstone markers that probably indicate graves from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The earliest inscribed stones have obit dates from the 1810s on; these range from crude slabs to rough-hewn head and foot stones with rounded, peaked, and effigy ("discoïd") forms. The finer antebellum stones have tympanums (decorative tops), epaulets (projections on the "shoulders" of the stones), and decorative carving. Joseph Ed. Bane (1814-17) has a headstone with a six-pointed star design of Germanic character carved into the almost circular tympanum. The obit date on the stone is uncertain due to corrosion, and other parts of the stone have spalled. Also of interest on the Joseph Ed. Bane stone is the way in which the "Ed." is carved. The E and D are in upper case Roman type, as is the rest of the inscription, but they are smaller than the other letters, suggesting the possibility the tombstone carver initially left them off and had to insert them afterward. Another possibility is the variation was an attempt by the carver to emulate the varied

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Giles County, Virginia

type styles of the inscriptions of professionally carved monuments of the era. Other antebellum stones are distinguished by idiosyncratic vernacular inscription styles, non-standard abbreviations, and the use of dialectic marks. One presumably antebellum effigy marker, a small uninscribed limestone headstone or footstone that may mark the grave of a child, is devoid of ornamentation except for pronounced beading that outlines the rounded head.

Most mid- to late nineteenth century stones are professionally carved marble monuments with conventional motifs such as willows, heavenward pointing fingers, clasped hands, Bibles, and broken flower buds. The largest marble monuments are those of Harriet Arriminta Weaver (1844-1904) and Zachariah (*sic*) Taylor Weaver (1847-1926), a draped plinth supporting a bas relief representation of a closed Bible, and the urn-topped obelisk of William B. Allen (1806-78), formerly surmounted by a stone orb that was broken off by a falling tree limb. Another marble monument of note is that of Georgie T. Shannon (1869-81), carved with a bouquet of flowers and a projecting oval inscription panel. The antedated marble headstone of John Shannon (born and died in 1829) has an unusual curved axe-headed top. Some marble monument inscriptions include poetic phrases such as "Flowers that bloom today / tomorrow die."

Most twentieth century monuments are carved from gray Georgia granite, although two locally made concrete markers with stamped and handwritten inscriptions exist. One of these has an obit date of 1921; the other marks the grave of Luther Woodward (1879-1908). Two clusters of early to mid-twentieth century infant and child graves exist, one group with heart-shaped granite tombstones, the other with lamb motifs. The majority of twentieth century granite monuments have standard tabular forms although two marking the graves of Shannon family members have more distinctive rusticated forms. The white section remains in use and has gray granite memorials with obit dates as recent as 2001. Recent tombstones are mostly concentrated in the southeast corner of the cemetery.

### **Black Section**

The black section of the Shannon Cemetery contains rows of fieldstone markers with the graves oriented in the east-west direction, as in the white section. Approximately forty-five graves indicated by fieldstones or grave depressions are evident, although it seems probable that there are more graves that are no longer visible above ground. The fieldstone markers probably date from the antebellum period through the early twentieth century. One inscribed monument has been observed, that of Harvey and Caroline Burks, which is undated but which has a form and low-relief foliated decoration typical of the early twentieth century. The surname is carved with bas relief letters set in a recessed panel with a saw tooth edging. The Burks tombstone, which has toppled, is accompanied by an upright marble footstone of unembellished rectangular form. Many graves are indicated by grave-shaped depressions and no longer have markers or the markers are obscured by undergrowth. The black section is no longer in use. The black and white

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sections are separated by a ravine. Their discontinuous character is the result of their historic development.

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Shannon Cemetery  
Giles County, Virginia

### NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

#### Summary

The Shannon Cemetery is eligible for listing under Criteria A and C and Criteria Consideration D for its association with ethnic history and settlement in Giles County, Virginia, and for the diversity and quality of its memorial art. The white section of the cemetery was established by settler Thomas Reid Shannon and its earliest grave is said to be that of one of his daughters who died in 1781. Gravemarker form and artistry include uninscribed fieldstones, vernacular tombstones with star designs and other decorative devices, and professionally carved marble and granite monuments. The black section of the cemetery with its rows of small fieldstone markers was established on an adjacent ridge in the nineteenth century. It remained in use until the early 1960s even as the county's African American population dwindled. The combined cemetery's period of significance extends from ca. 1800, approximately the period of the earliest surviving gravemarkers, through 1955. The Shannon Cemetery is eligible at the local level of significance.

#### Acknowledgments

A number of individuals and organizations assisted with the preparation of this nomination. Foremost among them were the project sponsor, the Shannon Cemetery Association, represented by W. Ernest Miller, and the owner of the two sections of the cemetery, Tom and Ellie Miller. Ernie and Tom Miller also provided information from oral history interviews, genealogical research, and other research in support of the nomination. At the Virginia Department of Historic Resources the nomination was reviewed by Michael Pulice, Jean McRae, and Marc Wagner.

#### Historic Context

The white section of the Shannon Cemetery was established by early settler Thomas Reid Shannon (1753-1841), a Revolutionary War hero, Montgomery County sheriff, and state legislator. The white section is located on the ridge above the site of Shannon's plantation house, Poplar Grove, which contained a section dating to 1780 and which burned on Christmas Eve 1897. The death of two-year-old Ann Shannon, a daughter of Thomas R. Shannon and his wife Nancy Agnes Crow Shannon (1760-1822), and her burial in 1781 is believed to have initiated the cemetery's development. The Shannon Cemetery is believed to be the oldest maintained cemetery in the county. Two Revolutionary War veterans are buried in the cemetery—Shannon and John Carr (1755-1837)—and seven Civil War veterans are interred there.<sup>1</sup>



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None of the Shannon Cemetery's vernacular tombstones appears to be signed, although the carver of one fragmentary stone may be identified by its style. The fragment, which has been affixed to a blank stone as a way of keeping it from being lost, bears the dates 18[11 or 41?] and 1846, probably birth and death dates, and is carved with a four-pointed star figure. The design is similar to stars and star-like motifs that ornament several robustly carved tombstones in the Bane Cemetery in the nearby White Gate vicinity that may be attributed to B. F. Spyker on the basis of their style. Spyker was one of the most accomplished tombstone carvers active in the region during the antebellum period, although little is known about his life or even his place of residence during the period. Signed work by Spyker appears in the Barger Cemetery near the intersection of Prices Fork Road and Toms Creek Road in Blacksburg and unsigned work appears in cemeteries elsewhere in Blacksburg, in Christiansburg, and in Lewisburg, West Virginia. Another, unknown carver with a recognizable style carved the headstone of Jane King (d. 1848), which has a simple inscription ornament consisting of a diamond flanked by outward-pointing arrows. The headstone of Anne F. Payne (d. 1851) in the Bane Cemetery has an identical diamond-and-arrow ornament. The Joseph Ed. Bane stone described in the description section of this report is similar in form and ornament to the Bane Cemetery headstone of Maria E. Miller (1826-1842), which also has a six-pointed star design. Several uneven rectangular tombstones such as the headstone of James H. Carr (1824-33) are densely packed with crudely carved inscriptions comprised of block letters and numerals. This tombstone type is fairly common in the region for the nineteenth century, although few examples have been published (an exception is a Roanoke County example published in Fall 1990 issue of *Notes on Virginia*).<sup>2</sup>

The Shannons were slaveholders. Thomas Reid Shannon owned eight slaves in 1810 and his son Thomas Shannon Jr. (1797-1884) owned twenty-four in 1850, the second largest slaveholding in the county. The black section of the Shannon Cemetery was established as a burial ground for the Shannon slaves and presumably those of other white slaveholders in the area. No other slave cemeteries are known for the Poplar Hill vicinity. The Shannon Cemetery is one of the few community resources associated with Giles County's historic rural African American community. The majority of the county's black population would have been engaged in agricultural labor, both before and after Emancipation, as was also true of the white population. Iron manufacturing and related activities (fuel harvesting, mining) would also have provided jobs, at least until the local iron industry dwindled at the end of the nineteenth century. The Norfolk and Western built its line to the West Virginia coal fields through the county during the 1880s, creating new employment opportunities for the county's black population, and resorts such as ones at Eggleston and Mountain Lake also provided work. Nevertheless, the county's African American population dwindled as a proportion of total population during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Black population fell from 12% in 1860 to 7% in 1920, 3% in 1960, and 1.6% in 2000. From about fifteen black families in the Big Walker Creek Valley in the 1930s, the number has decreased to one today. Outmigration is the principal cause of the decline. Some of the county's rural African American population moved to area towns, which accounts in

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part for the existence of the county's few surviving black churches in Pembroke and the Bluff City section of Pearisburg. Others would likely have moved to the region's cities where greater economic opportunities existed or were perceived to exist.<sup>3</sup>

The only burial in the black section recalled by elderly African American residents of the area interviewed for the nomination by W. Tom Miller was that of Andy Hicks in the early to mid-1960s. This suggests that few if any burials were made in the section from about 1930 until the 1960s, which would agree with information that black outmigration accelerated in the Poplar Hill vicinity in the 1930s (a similar rural outmigration of African Americans occurred in the Buffalo district of Rockbridge County during the same general period). Hicks belonged to one of several African American families who lived in the area during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These included the Davis, Deans, Montgomery, and Woods families. The only inscribed (but undated) gravestone observed in the black section is that of Harvey and Caroline Burks. The 1870 federal census identifies Harvey Burks as a thirty-three-year-old African American resident of the county. Caroline may have been a second wife since the 1883 marriage record for Harvey's son Henry Burks (b. 1862) notes that his parents were Harvey Burks and Nancy Thompson. Although approximately forty-five graves are now visible, it is likely that there are more graves in the section that are no longer visible owing to the fact that the black section of the Shannon Cemetery is the only African American burial ground in the community and the black population of the area was larger than would be indicated by a graveyard of fewer than fifty interments.<sup>4</sup>

The Shannon Cemetery belongs to the tradition of hilltop cemetery siting described by archaeologist Thomas S. Klatka in his study of Roanoke County cemeteries. Its monuments illustrate a wide range of form and artistry associated with the social, cultural and historical contexts of the cemetery. The fieldstone markers are associated with pioneer conditions, slavery, and post-bellum black impoverishment. The indigenous antebellum inscribed, shaped, and decorated stones illustrate the talents of folk carvers whose work reflected ethnic traditions and the influence of memorial styles from outside the locality. The professionally carved marble memorials of the mid-nineteenth century and later, many of them probably produced outside the county, attest to the integration of the Big Walker Creek Valley into the cultural mainstream, facilitated by transportation improvements such as the opening of the Virginia and Tennessee rail line just to the south in 1854 and the nearer New River line of the Norfolk and Western Railroad in the 1880s. Cultural integration continued with the introduction of granite monuments in the twentieth century when gray Georgia granite came to dominate the memorial trade nationwide. The local culture continued to express itself, however, as demonstrated by the cemetery's concrete markers with their unusual mix of stamped and handwritten characters. Concrete came into use in the area in the early twentieth century for front walkways and foundations, and local gravemaker makers soon discovered the affordability and plasticity of the material.<sup>5</sup>

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Giles County, Virginia

The black section of the Shannon Cemetery follows patterns also observed by Thomas Klatka in his Roanoke County cemetery study. In its basic form and arrangement of graves the section is not unlike the white section—a comparative similarity noted in Roanoke County—and its mix of unmarked graves and graves marked with uninscribed fieldstones is also typical of Roanoke area black cemeteries. Uninscribed gravemarkers are also commonly found in historic African American cemeteries documented by Lynn Rainville in Albemarle County. An aspect of African American burial customs no longer readily apparent in the black section is evidence of grave goods. African American grave goods could include household items used by the deceased during or at the end of their lives, or objects with deep-rooted symbolic associations that some researchers interpret as a survival of West African traditions. The apparent lack of grave goods in the black section of the Shannon Cemetery is probably due to the overgrown condition of the cemetery and the fact that it has not been in active use for many years. Assuming grave goods were placed in the cemetery in the past, they may survive archaeologically.<sup>6</sup>

### Endnotes

1. W. Ernest Miller personal communication; Pezzoni, “Shannon Cemetery.”
2. Pezzoni, “Virginian to the Grave,” 65; Miller, “Notes from the Director,” 4.
3. W. Ernest Miller personal communication; University of Virginia federal census website; Johnson, *Mountain Lake Resort*, 59, 61. Samuel Lewis King (b. 1907), the uncle of one of the cemetery owners, always spoke of the black section as a slave cemetery, and other residents whose families have lived in the area for many generations confirm the identification (W. Tom Miller and W. Ernest Miller personal communication).
4. W. Ernest Miller personal communication; Pezzoni, “Cedar Hill Church and Cemeteries,” 12.
5. Klatka, “Cultural Expressions,” 21.
6. Ibid, 27; Rainville, “African American Cemeteries,” Patterson, “Grave Markers,” 480; Little, *Sticks and Stones*, 237, 266-268; Pezzoni, “Virginian to the Grave,” 70.

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Publishers, 1970.

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Giles County, Virginia

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### Verbal Boundary Description

The boundaries of the two discontinuous sections of the cemetery are shown on the 1:200-scale map that accompanies the nomination.

### Boundary Justification

The boundaries of the white section of the cemetery correspond to the area enclosed by the cemetery fence. The boundaries of the black section correspond to the perimeter of the roughly rectangular area where gravemarkers are observed.

### All photographs are of:

#### **SHANNON CEMETERY**

Giles County, Virginia

DHR file no. 035-5028

J. Daniel Pezzoni, Photographer

DATE: May 2005

VIEW OF: White or south section of cemetery on ridge in middle distance (shaded by maple tree).

View looking northwest from across Rt. 42.

NEG. NO.: 22142:29A

PHOTO 1 OF 4

DATE: May 2005

VIEW OF: White (south) section of cemetery with black (north) section visible as grove of cedars and small deciduous trees on ridge in middle distance. View looking north.

NEG. NO.: 22142:23A

PHOTO 2 OF 4

DATE: May 2005

VIEW OF: Fieldstone marker in black section (note keys for scale).

NEG. NO.: 22141:15

PHOTO 3 OF 4

DATE: May 2005

VIEW OF: Headstone of Joseph Ed. Bane (1814-17) in white section.

NEG. NO.: 22142:25A

PHOTO 4 OF 4